

State of Alaska Annual Report
National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation program (NTHMP)
FY 2003

Alaska continues to make progress in its tsunami program. This progress comes at a time when Division of Emergency Services (DES) is currently working five federally declared disasters. The recent 8.0 earthquake in Hokkaido, Japan, with its resulting warnings and watches in Alaska, has renewed interest in the Tsunami Sign program. Due to the recent potential tsunami threat, DES has taken the opportunity to reengage communities that had not previously responded to our initial outreach materials. Since this earthquake, communities have inquired about the tsunami sign program.

The following information summarizes our activities since the last report.

TsunamiReady

Two communities have been certified as TsunamiReady within the past four months. This brings the total of TsunamiReady communities in Alaska to four. Seward was certified in 2002 and Homer held its TsunamiReady recognition ceremony at the beginning of 2003. That ceremony had originally been scheduled for November 2002, however the date was changed as a result of the 7.9 Denali Fault Earthquake. Sitka held its recognition ceremony in July and Kodiak was recently approved in October with their recognition ceremony to be held in December 2003.

Tsunami Mitigation Plans were approved for the communities of Homer, Sitka and Kodiak. These plans are an Alaskan requirement to become TsunamiReady.

The communities of Valdez, Yakutat and Chignik have begun the initial process toward becoming TsunamiReady. Information packages on the program have been sent to Yakutat and Chignik. DES personnel traveled to Valdez to assist city emergency planners with preliminary tsunami evacuation mapping and shelter selection. A goal of Valdez is to become Alaska's next TsunamiReady community. Once these communities complete their evacuation plans and evacuation route design, tsunami signs will be ordered.

The TsunamiReady Program was a topic at this year's Alaska Emergency Management Conference. Attendees at the conference included community leaders and emergency managers. The theme of the conference was Flooding in Alaska.

Pamphlet/Brochure distribution

Tsunami pamphlets, brochures and other public outreach materials were distributed during numerous visits to communities, businesses, schools, etc.

Tsunami awareness informative brochures that include safety tips and evacuation maps were produced and distributed in Seward. Additionally, community specific brochures for Homer, Sitka and Kodiak have been designed and will be produced and distributed by the end of the year.

Public outreach

DES's "Quake Cottage" continues to be a successful vehicle to disseminate tsunami awareness information. Although the focus of the Quake Cottage is earthquake preparedness, tsunami materials are distributed to those visiting the cottage. Major events for the Quake Cottage over the summer include: Alaska State Fair, Tanana Valley Fair, Elmendorf AFB Air

Show, Kenai River Festival, and the Governors Picnic. In addition to these major events, the cottage made visits to numerous schools and businesses along the States road system. In general, DES personnel and the “Quake Cottage” visited over twenty sites and made direct contact with over 7,000 individuals in five months. Our efforts with the cottage earned DES the WSSPC Award in Excellence 2003 - “Outreach to General Public”.

Visits to the communities of Tatitlik and Chenega were made by DES, WC/ATWC, NWS, and the American Red Cross (ARC) to promote TsunamiReady program participation, and ARC preparedness initiatives.

Development of a tsunami video in partnership with UAF/Seismology and Sea Grant continues and the video is nearing completion.

We are researching the possibility of partnering with Alaska Division of Homeland Security to put multi-purpose warning speakers/sirens in tsunami threatened communities to fulfill both Homeland Security and Tsunami notification goals. Partnering with Homeland Security may allow us to purchase and install the systems at reduced costs.

Our interpretive sign program remains in the design phase. Progress on interpretive signs for Seward, Homer and Kodiak has been delayed due to higher priorities caused by earlier mentioned federally declared disasters within the past year.

Inundation mapping

The majority of modeling in the Homer/Seldovia area is finished and ATMT is drafting the report. Development of the maps was a long process due to lack of quality topographical data.

Sitka is our next community scheduled for mapping, however, both the topography and bathymetry in that region are of limited resolution. New bathymetry surveys for Sitka were completed this year, but that data may not be available until 2005.

See the in-depth attached Progress Report titled “Alaska Tsunami Inundation Mapping Project and TWEAK Element I: Accelerated Alaska Inundation Map Production” By Roger Hansen, UAF.

Travel/Meetings

DES members traveled to several locations over the past year. Two individuals attended the NTHMP SG meeting in November 2002, although one member was recalled in response to the Denali Fault Earthquake. One individual attended the NTHMP SG budget meeting in April 2003. A total of five personnel attended TsunamiReady ceremonies this year, and three individuals traveled to communities to promote and discuss tsunami preparedness. Two members attended the annual WSPC meeting in Portland, OR. Prior to the WSSPC meeting, a field trip was made to two Oregon costal communities where different tsunami warning and evacuation issues were discussed and observed.

Personnel from DES, NWS and the WC/ATWC met at the new Tsunami Warning Center in Palmer, AK to discuss the upcoming year’s community outreach efforts and prioritize the next communities for the TsunamiReady Program. Following the meeting, we were briefed on the capabilities of the new center and given a tour of the facility.

Submitted by Ervin Petty, Alaska Division of Emergency Services